

Early Video History at Visual Studies Workshop Cynthia Young

Director Nathan Lyons. 1973 established media center, with production facility, workshops and exhibition. Media Center coordinators included: Wayne Luke, Laddy Kite, Arthur Tsuchiya, Nancy Norwood, Mona Jimenez, Robert Doyle, James Lohrey. *Afterimage* begins publication in 1973 and offered coverage of video. Publication by VSW of *Spaghetti City Video Manual*, in exchange for staff training in video by the Freex, the first outside book published by the VSW Press.

General Description

Serious video activity at the Visual Studies Workshop started in the early part of 1974. The first student to graduate with a concentration in video was Larry Gale in 1973, whose project investigated the use of video with young people in schools, library programs, in video groups, in workshops and related situations, through three pilot programs. The first workshop in video was conducted by John Randolph Carter, a video artist with a strong background in graphics. Carter taught three separate workshops utilizing his own equipment. Although fundamental technological considerations were presented, Carter explained that "the main thrust was toward the use of closed circuit television to facilitate creative interaction and improvisation. There was no attempt to duplicate commercial television procedures, and all participants were encouraged to collaborate and initiate activities as part of an ensemble."

Also in place at this time, and continued throughout the 70s and early 80s, were free weekly film screenings at VSW, either outside in the parking lot of the building, or inside as the weather became colder. The programming was begun by Scott Hammen (a VSW student) in 1973 and was then continued by other VSW students. The films came from those available at the Rochester Public Library or rented from MoMA and other rental facilities. The selection of different traditions of experimental and documentary films clearly reflected a sophisticated community that was interested in the history of moving images.

In the spring of 1974, the Visual Studies Workshop, with the assistance of a 1973-74 grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, purchased its first package of video equipment. This initial equipment was very much "studio" oriented, with its primary utilization being toward in-house productions.

During the Summer Workshop program of that year, the Videofreex, an independent video group, conducted a video workshop utilizing the new equipment in exchange for printing the handbook of the medium called *The Spaghetti City Video Manual*. It was the first outside book published by the VSW Press. The workshop was designed to explore video as a creative visual and audio medium. At the time, the Videofreex also had an exhibition of video work in the VSW Gallery. The Videofreex conducted another a workshop in the summer of 1975.

In the beginning of the '74-'75 academic year, 25 students took part in a series of two-week, basic instructional workshops using the newly acquired equipment. During these two-week workshops, students gained a working familiarity with the video tape hardware, and were able to set up and operate a closed circuit system involving three cameras, switcher, keyer, monitors and the accompanying audio systems. These students also were given an introduction to the process of electronic editing. The syllabus for the two-week workshop stated: "With the acquisition of these basic skills, the student will be better able to utilize the medium to further his personal creative explorations and involvements with his own projects and surroundings."

At the end of the initial two-week workshops, longer more intense workshops were conducted on an on-going basis. A nucleus of interested students participated through all of these, and were responsible for most of the subsequent video projects and activities.

[The following is a brief explanation of various video projects and activities that were undertaken

during the '74-'75 academic year. This extensive report was probably compiled by Laddy Kite, Media Center Coordinator 1974-78, in preparation for a NYSCA grant proposal, and although some of the facts have been updated, many of the statements reflect the situation in the mid 1975.]

The first major event that utilized the Workshop's equipment outside of the Workshop, occurred at the Strassenburgh Planetarium in Rochester on September 20 and 21, 1974. The event, called Polyfusion, was a multi-media performance involving audio and video hardware, technicians, musicians, instruments and performers from several of the northeast states, with music by the Central Maine Power Company and video by Survival Media Arts and Bill Etra on the Rutt/Etra video synthesizer. Additional help was made by Portable Channel, Z.B.S. Media, General Electric, WXXI Channel 21 and Visual Studies Workshop. It took three days to assemble, set-up and test the whole system on the Planetarium dome. There were three evenings of public performances. The Visual Studies Workshop supplied video equipment and support personnel. In addition, post-production work on a booklet evolving from the Polyfusion event was done at the Workshop. This included all aspects of VSW: videotape editing facilities, darkroom facilities, super 8mm film equipment and printshop facilities.

After the Polyfusion event, the Workshop provided equipment and/or technical assistance to other Rochester area organizations, including Portable Channel, for the production of their "Homemade T.V." series (aired on WXXI Channel 21) and for a video workshop involving Walter Wright (video artist in residence at the Experimental Television Center in Binghamton), and the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, for an on-going exhibition of video tapes, and once for a presentation by Canadian video artist Colin Campbell.. This arrangement was a two-way street in that the Workshop borrowed equipment from both of these organizations on several occasions.

On a few occasions, the Workshop made its video equipment and people available for projects involving people outside the Workshop. This has so far proved beneficial for all parties concerned. The outside people have use of a "production facility" for the cost of blank tape, and workshop students get experience on real productions for a specific purpose.

The first of these involved assistance on the production of a tape segment for video artist Sandy Rockowitz. Another, involved the production of a tape for interpretive dancer Lois Fulton. This tape was later used in conjunction with an application for a C.A.P.S. grant. A promotional tape for a circus/vaudeville group called "Flash in the Pan" was also produced during this period.

Just about mid 1974, the Workshop was able to make an additional equipment purchase, again with the assistance of the New York State Council on the Arts. This additional equipment greatly increased production capabilities both for video and audio.

Along with video projects for other people and organizations, a nucleus of students produced several tapes involving projects of their own. These tapes cover a wide range of video work from pure documentary to abstract, synthesized imagery. A great deal of time has been spent just exploring the parameters of the equipment as well as the medium itself. However, all of the tapes, explorations and activity have utilized the medium to further expand the individual student's means of self expression and creativity.

Another application of the Workshop's video system, was recording the presentations and lectures of visiting artists and speakers. Artists of all media were visiting the workshop on a regular basis and giving lectures and showing their work through the Visiting Artist Program. (Detailed list follows.) Often these presentations were audio and/or video tape recorded.

The presence of Afterimage was another critical element in the media activity at VSW. Afterimage began in 1972 and in October 1974 the first article on video was published. Since then Afterimage has been committed to coverage of the media arts in conference and festival reports and exhibition reviews as well as interviews with important makers and critics, many of whom gave presentations at VSW.

Aside from the actual production of tapes, the Workshop was represented at a number of video conferences or activities. Early in 1974, representatives were sent to the major video conference at the Everson Museum in Syracuse. Since that time, Workshop students have attended conferences across the United States. Several students traveled to Synapse in Syracuse to view the entries submitted for the

C.A.P.S. grants in video. Other "field trips" include excursions to General Idea and Art Metropol in Toronto to view examples of Canadian video art. Many Workshop students have also gone through WXXI Channel 21, the P.B.S. broadcast facility in Rochester. Students also participated in technical and synthesizer workshops given by Portable Channel. One Workshop student was asked to sit on a panel during a conference designed to acquaint local civic groups of video activity in the Rochester area. A workshop student always sat on the project review committee at Portable Channel.

One of the on-going projects at the Visual Studies Workshop, involves the exploration of possible uses of video graphics. To this end, video imagery has been translated into various other media, and used for cover graphics for Afterimage, membership leaflets, gallery posters, ect. Several issues of Afterimage used video imagery in various ways. Four students had video imagery exhibited at Rochester Memorial Art Gallery in the form of still photographs. Extensive use of video graphics was made in the production of the Polyfusion booklet.

Additional uses of the video system involve the documentation of various workshop activities. For example the opening of the Workshop Gallery and Print Sales Office was recorded on video tape. Several students constructed a video installation/exhibition involving various aspects of the medium, perception and communication in general. The construction of the installation was recorded on video tape as well as the various video elements of the construction itself.

A visiting artist program in video was established in 1974-75. The Visual Studies Workshop received a grant of \$7000 from the New York State Council on the Arts to bring five video artists or groups to the Workshop for a period of from one to two weeks each. They included Nam June Paik, Louise Etra, Bill Viola, Ernest Gusella, Peter Crown, David Cort and Davidson Gigliotti.

In conjunction with the visiting artist program, the Workshop worked with WXXI Channel 21 to produce tapes by video artists that were part of a special four-hour live broadcast aired in late May, 1975. A post-production brochure was also published at the Workshop which documented the event.

In addition to the other activities in the media center, students explored the medium of slide/tape, a slide presentation with the addition of a synchronized, programmed audio tape. There were several image makers using this medium that gave presentations at the Workshop. Among them are David Heath, Photography Instructor at Ryerson Institute of Technology, Toronto; Dana Atchley, originator and perpetrator of Ace Space; and Tom Porrett, Assistant professor at the Philadelphia College of Art. Tom Porrett also conducted a workshop on slide/tape presentations during the summer program. A student produced slide/tape presentation was shown at local high schools and at least one New York State prison in conjunction with a one day workshop for prisoners.

1975-76

Video activities continued to proliferate. Equipment exchanges continued between VSW and several local organizations, including Rochester Memorial Art Gallery and a performance group, "Flash in the Pan." Portable Channel borrowed VSW equipment for the production of their "Homemade T.V." as well as for public showing of tapes.

Workshop students produced tapes of local musicians including blues guitarist Michael Rothman and folk singer Mitzie Collins. A videotape of renowned photographer Jacques-Henri Lartigue was produced and shown in conjunction with an exhibition of Lartigue's photographs in the VSW Gallery. Westcoast video artist Steve Biancrosso came to the Workshop for a week to utilize the editing systems and gave a performance/presentation at the end of his stay. Robert Longo, a video artist from Buffalo, also spent a week editing his work at the Workshop and gave a presentation. Nancy Rosin edited a portion of her award winning documentary "Women in the Ministry" at VSW. Luke Oberle utilized VSW equipment to transfer to videotape several hundred feet of film shot in China and Africa. David Cort used VSW equipment in the construction of a video installation erected in a local shopping mall. George Howell, director of Hallwalls, gave a talk at VSW.

VSW and Hallwalls together sponsored a Video Festival. A national call for work was published in Afterimage. The tapes were first shown in Rochester and then in Buffalo.

Several instructional tapes were produced, each demonstrating a process or technique used in one

of the areas at the Workshop. A three channel video tape was exhibited by former VSW student Larry Gale, then living in Portland, Oregon.

The following video artists gave workshops at VSW with assistance from the New York State Council on the Arts. Dave Willis's workshop met once each week for the second semester. He and his students were exploring some of the ways that multiple slide images could be displayed through the use of a custom "key operated, projector advance unit." Elements of performance and other media were incorporated in their project. Steina Vasulka gave a one week workshop, March 22-27. Steina brought several pieces of her own hardware allowing students to delve into some of the technical aspects of processed image making. During the week she also showed several tapes by other artists from her own library. Nam June Paik also gave a one-week workshop, April 26-30. Nam June arrived with his synthesizer and various other pieces of hardware along with several tapes produced at WNET.

1977-78

In a questionnaire for the Media Arts Program, the VSW Media Center orientation was described as "Documentary/Experimental."

Screening of the 1977-78 Creative Artist Program Service (C.A.P.S.) fellowship recipients in video, February 20-21.

1978-79

The following filmmakers, video artists and performance artists presented their work at VSW as part of the Visual Studies Workshop Visiting Artist program, sponsored in part by C.A.P.S., the New York State Council on the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Chuck Hagen, Managing Editor at Afterimage, and Arthur Tsuchiya, Media Center Coordinator, were the VSW coordinators.: Marjorie Keller, New York City Filmmaker and Film Critic, "Surrealism and Dada," October 2; Tony Conrad, artist and filmmaker, Center for Media Studies, SUNY Buffalo, presentation of films and video tapes, October 9; Steina and Woody Vasulka, Video Artists, Center for Media Studies, SUNY Buffalo, presentation of video tapes, October 23; Jack Goldstein, filmmaker, New York City, presentation of films and records, October 30; Gene Youngblood, author and teacher of film and video art, "The Future of Desire", November 6; Constance de Jong, Writer and Performance Artist, a reading; James Byrne, video artist, Minneapolis, gave two lectures and constructed an installation, February 5; Jonas Mekas, independent filmmaker and co-founder of Anthology Film Archives, film screening and lecture, February 12; David Antin, poet and critic, "The Status of Fact and Narrative in Photography and Video", April 4; William Wegman, video artist, April 26; Robert Polidori, photographer and filmmaker, screening and lecture, May 7; Yvonne Rainer, dancer and filmmaker, New York City, film screening and discussion, May 11; Andre Norton, filmmaker, New York City, screening of Charmed Particles and discussion, October 10, 1978 or 79.

1979-80

The following filmmakers, video artists and performance artists presented their work at VSW: Mary Lucier, videomaker, New York City, installation and lecture on her work; Carolee Schneeman, filmmaker and performance artist, New York City, screening of Kitch's Last Meal; Alison Knowles, bookmaker and performance artist, New York City, presentation of three performances; Laurie Spiegel, composer and videomaker, New York City, presentation and discussion of her work, March 11, 1980; J.J. Murphy, filmmaker, Brooklyn, NY, screening and discussion of his work; Barbara Buckner, videomaker and 1979-80 C.A.P.S. recipient, presentation of Pictures of the Lost and Hearts and discussion of her work, April 17, 1980; Ralph Hocking and Sherry Miller Hocking, Synthesized videomakers, Binghamton, NY, presentation and discussion of their work; William Wegman; Les Levine, New York, presentation of video tape and lecture "Media: The Bio-Tech Rehearsal For Leaving The Body," April 23, 1980; Nancy Cain; Steven Kolpan; 50 film and video screenings, including the GANYS Animated Film Program, December 13, 1979.

1980-81

The following filmmakers, video artists and performance artists gave a lecture at VSW: C.A.P.S. Video Festival, presentation of tapes by fellowship recipients, "Life in Art," "Electronic Visions" and "Video Culture," September 24, 25, 26 respectively; Larry Gottheim, filmmaker, Binghamton, NY, presentation of film; James Byrne; Howard Fried, video artist, San Francisco, presentation of work, February 26; Martha Rosler, critic and artist, Rutgers University, "Documentary Photography", "Fragmentary Images of Women" and presentation of video tapes; Phillip Mallery-Jones, video artist, Ithaca NY, presentation of video tapes, March 11; Linda Klosky, filmmaker, Sante Fe, New Mexico, presentation of films; Shalom Gorewitz, video artist, presentation of videotapes, April 8; Ithaca Video Project; C.A.P.S. videos by 79-80 recipients, September 24-26.

1981-82

Nancy Norwood takes over from Arthur in September 1981 as coordinator of the Media Center. Steina Vasulka gave a lecture titled "Digital Video," October 21, 1981; Joseph Celli, organic oboe, gave an evening of new music and multi-media performance, October 30; From the Academy to the Avant Garde, video exhibition curated by Richard Simmons with videos by 79 artists, was shown at the VSW Gallery December 2-16 and then became part of the traveling exhibition program; C.A.P.S. Video Festival, videotapes by the 1980-81 award recipients in video, screened October 26-29; two documentaries screened in conjunction with the Rochester Textile Group Women in Silk and Ware Massachusetts by

Morgan Wesson and Richard Barber. January 10, 1982; Rita Myers presented and discussed her video installations, January 20, 1982; Antonio Muntadas presented his work and his installation La Television was shown for three days, February 17, 1982; Bill Viola, screened Ancient of Days and Hatsu Yume (First Dream), March 23, 1982 (received \$200); David Rose, video artist, screened his work, March 31, 1982;

Barbara London, director of Projects: Video at MoMA, delivered lecture titled "Extended Video" on the development of video installation in relation to other concurrent cultural activity, April 15, 1982; John Caldwell, Southern Californian video artist, presented and discussed his work. May 5, 1982; Ithaca Video Festival, May 11-14

1982-83

Barbara Sykes, Chicago video artist, September 21, 1982; Richard Barber screened Reflecto-Vision, Complicated Fun and Nightclub. November 2; C.A.P.S. Multi-Media Festival Radical Departures November 9-11, 1982; John Sanborn, video artist. November 12, 1982; Dan Graham gave lecture "Theater Cinema Television" on January 19 and his model Cinema 1981 was on display for a week following the lecture; 1982 C.A.P.S. recipients; MANUALÑ Susan Bloom and Ed Hill, (13 Ways of Coping with Nature was on display in the main Gallery from February 9-April 2) February 9; Dee Dee Halleck presented sampler from Paper Tiger Television series, February 16; Karen Ranucci, from Downtown Community Television Center in NYC, March 2; Ishmael Reed screened and discussed parts 1 and 2 of Personal Problems, March 12; Tanya Weinberger screened Frogamorphoses with Mike Nguyen, April 11; Lynn Corcoran gave lecture and screening of her work, including In Our Own Backyard, April 13; Gary Hill video lecture/ and presentation of This, That and the Other Thing, April 20 (given \$150 plus travel and lodging expenses); Ithaca Video Festival, May 11-14

1983-84

In early 1983 a call for video installation work was placed by the Media Center under the direction of Nancy Norwood. From over 100 proposals received, five artists each received \$1000 as honorarium for exhibiting their installation: Barbara Buckner, Tony Conrad, Doug Hall, Margia Kramer and Bill Stephens. Another 10 proposals were awarded \$250: Eugenia Balcells, Judith Barry, Richard Bloes, Terry Berkowitz, Peter D'Agostino, Gary Hill, Rita Myers, Marshall Reese and Nora Ligorano, Mike Smith and Alan Herman, and Steina and Woody Vasulka. The exhibition catalog was compiled and put together as a special addition of Afterimage and included descriptions of all the winning proposals. The jurors were filmmaker Hollis Frampton, Curator of Film and Video at the Whitney Museum of American Art John Hanhardt and videomaker Antonio Muntadas. The exhibition was held at VSW November 4-December 2 and all of the exhibiting artists discussed their work at the opening reception. On November 15, Hanhardt gave a lecture titled "Video Art: Expanded Form" at the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery. All of the received proposals, unless specified otherwise by the artist, became part of the VSW collection

By the mid semester of that year, an artist-in-residence access program was clearly in place and about 12 artists received free access grants. Other video lectures included Ulrike Rosenbach, December 13, and John Minkowsky, curator of the "Video/TV: Humor/Comedy" video exhibition shown at the Gallery, on January 5. In February 1984, Bob Doyle became Media Center coordinator and Nancy Norwood went to the Media Study Program at Buffalo. Also in 1984, two 13 week video series called "NO-TV" were produced at VSW and aired on the local cable TV channel.

1986

Upstate Media Conference was held at VSW in May. VSW was also the regional coordinator for the National Video Festival presented by the American Film Institute. All of the regional entries were sent and judged at VSW.

1989

In March 1989, the National Alliance of Media Art Centers conference was organized and hosted by VSW. The theme was Media and Education, and included screenings of the 2nd Annual Student Film and Video Festival. The conference sessions included were all audio taped.

1993

Montage '93 was a major city-wide festival of the media arts organized by Nathan Lyons and VSW. Video installations and projections and digital imagery were featured in both traditional and non-traditional exhibition spaces around the city. Lectures by prominent theorists in the field were also held in conjunction with the event.

Media Center Coordinators

Laddy Kite Fall 1974 - Spring 1978. VSW Graduate. Moved to Washington State to work at a PBS Station.

Arthur Tsuchiya Spring 1978 - Fall 1981. Left to work at the New York State Council on the Arts.

Nancy Norwood Fall 1981-1984. Left for Media Studies in Buffalo

Bob Doyle February 1984- Returned to Syracuse University for the Ph.D. program and continued to teach media classes at VSW.

Mona Jimenez Became Director, Media Alliance, New York City; independent preservation consultant and media artist

Pia Cseri-Briones 1996. Began working at the University of Rochester and has continued to make films.

Bob Doyle 1996-98.

James Lowery 1998-present Graduate of Media Studies Program at Buffalo.

Research Center

There are extensive papers concerning all aspects of the media center activity from its inception to the present, from the general operating files to the highly specific equipment notes: program descriptions, workshop outlines, equipment purchase receipts, equipment check-out forms (?), grant proposals, promotional materials (including posters and photographs) and all related correspondence. All of the information included here was taken from the files. Most of the proposals for residencies and exhibitions held at VSW are in the archive. Contact the Research Center to arrange to visit the Workshop.

Video and Audio Tape Collections

The videotape collection at VSW began with material that was first produced during the early workshops with John Randolph Carter and the Videofreex. As other artists came to give presentations, they left behind copies of their work. Many of the above mentioned lectures were recorded on audio or videotape (sometimes in the form of an interview with the subject). There is also video documentation of various receptions and activities at VSW, including classes with Nathan Lyons and other teachers. The videotapes from the "NO-TV" series has been a main source of new material since 1984 as well as donations of several major video collections. In 1989, Portable Channel gave their entire collection of videotapes to VSW, a collection that spanned almost 20 years of production. In 1991, VSW received a number of videotapes by local and regional makers from the Rochester Public Library. In 1993, most of the material from the Ithaca Video Festival was deposited at the Media center by Philip Mallory Jones, a long time member of the Ithaca Video Festival. In 1994, VSW became the archive location for material that had been part of the Electronic Media and Film Program at the New York State Council of the Arts. There are over 4000 video tapes in the collection.

